

9/11 Remembrance: only known survivor from impact zone credits God

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By Mark Ellis —

The 9/11 Commission credits Stanley Praitnath as the only known survivor from the impact zone at the World Trade Center towers on September 11.

“The Lord saw fit for me to live,” says Praitnath, who works in the banking industry in New York. His riveting tale of survival is chronicled in “Plucked from the Fire” (Rosedog Books), coauthored with William Hennessey.

Praitnath, born in Guyana, came to America with little money in his pockets in 1981. When he arrived, Praitnath landed a job in the garment industry in Jersey City, New Jersey, where he earned \$125 a week. Then he got a job as a file clerk for a bank in downtown Manhattan.



Stanley Praitnath

Growing up in Guyana, his mother insisted he attend church, but he rebelled and drifted away during high



school. “I woke up one day in America and decided I wanted to be a good guy, whatever ‘good’ means,” he recalls. Then a friend called and invited him to church. “The more I went, the more I liked what I saw,” Praitnath says. He was born-again in 1983.

A few years later he married a pastor’s daughter and started a new career with Fuji Bank. On the side, he helped his father-in-law plant a church in a rough neighborhood of Queens, New York.

Within five years Praitnath advanced to Asst. Vice-President, running all of Fuji Bank’s operations on the 81st floor of the World Trade Center, Tower 2. That floor was immense—approximately one acre square, and almost completely soundproof from the outside.

Praitnath thought he was on top of the world – even planes flew at the same level. When he looked down, everything looked small. Praitnath says most of the people he worked with at Fuji Bank were Buddhists or Shinto; there were only a handful of Christians.

When most people went to lunch, Praitnath sat at his desk with a salad or soup, reading his Bible. He tried to share about Christ when he had opportunities, but most didn’t want to hear.

Critical events transpire

On the morning of Sept. 11, he was riding up the elevator to his office at 8:45 a.m. when Tower One was hit by the first plane. Riding in the elevator, Praitnath didn’t see or hear a thing.

As soon as he laid his briefcase down he began to receive a barrage of phone calls, first from his mother, then his wife and brothers. “Stan, are you OK?” they asked. He said, “Yes, yes, I’m fine,” but none of them told him what happened. He wondered why his family was checking up on him.



When he hung up he glanced out his window for the first time. He was stunned to see huge chunks of fiery debris—“fireballs”—falling from Tower One. The other half of Fuji Bank’s operations were in that tower, so he called there to try to reach his boss. There was no answer.

Praimnath decided it was time to get out, so he jumped in an elevator and headed down to the lobby. He was about to go through the turnstile exit when a security guard stopped him. “Where are you going?” the man asked.

“I’m going home,” Stanley said.

The security guard said: “No, the building is safe and secure, go back to your office.” Soon an intercom was piping in the same message: “Your attention please, ladies and gentlemen, Building 2 is secure. There is no need to evacuate Building 2.”

Praimnath got into the express elevator and in less than a minute was back up to the 81st floor. Several of his co-workers rode in the same elevator. They were laughing and exchanging pleasantries. When he got off that elevator, it was the last time he would see them again.

He walked into his office and the phone rang immediately. It was a woman from Chicago. “Stan, Stan, get out, get out of the building.” He assured the woman he was fine. “But you’re not logged on to the computer,” she said. Stanley still didn’t know a plane hit the first building.

At eye-level with United flight 175

As he assured the woman he was safe, he stood up near his desk, while he held the phone in his hand, and just happened to look toward the Statue of Liberty. Suddenly he saw a huge plane, gray in color, that flew straight at him. “It was coming at me at eye-level contact,” he notes. Praimnath could make out the letter ‘U’ on the tail.



It was United flight 175.



recreation of moment before impact

“As the plane was getting nearer I could hear a revving sound the engine was making, like the sound a plane makes when it’s about to take off,” Praimnath says. “Quadruple that sound, and that’s the sound I could hear, even in this soundproof building. I can still hear that sound in my head,” he says. “That sound will never go away.”

“I’m standing up looking at this plane getting bigger and nearer,” Praimnath says. “You don’t know how fast your mind is reacting.”

In desperation he cried out to God: “Lord, I can’t do this—you take over,” and he dove under his desk. Praimnath’s Bible still sat on top of the desk. The plane slammed into the building with immense force. The bottom of the wing sliced through his office and stuck in his office door 20 feet away from where he huddled.

“There was a massive fireball as the major part of the plane blew up,” Praimnath says. “The only desk that stood firm was the one I was hiding under because my Bible was on top of that desk.”

Every wall was flattened as if a demolition crew had passed through. Other than his desk, every other piece of office furniture was smashed like match boxes. Part of the floor above his head collapsed downward, and all the cables in the ceiling were dangling, falling and short-circuiting, because the sprinklers came on.

“I thought if the floor doesn’t completely collapse and kill me, I’ll be electrocuted or the plane’s wing is going to blow up and I’m going to die.” Above Praimnath, a fiery inferno was raging. Fire had also broken out on

moment of impact



his floor, some distance away. But in Praitnath's office, there was no fire. "That is a miracle," he says. "I was covered under the shadow of the Lord."

Praitnath had no way of knowing the clock was ticking, and his building would completely collapse within an hour's time.

He pushed debris away that was up to his shoulders. He couldn't completely stand up because the roof had collapsed downward. There was no way out of his office, because the plane's wing blocked the only exit door.

A prayer of desperation

Praitnath let out an anguished cry to the Lord with every fiber of his being: "Lord, send somebody to help me...I don't want to die. What will happen to my wife and two kids?"

At that moment, Brian Clark, an executive vice-president with Euro Brokers, was walking down the only passable staircase from the 84th floor with six other people. Clark happened to be the fire warden on his floor, so he had a flashlight. When the group reached the 81st floor they ran into a woman who told them to turn around and go back up.

But at that moment Clark heard somebody far away who screamed and banged on a wall: "Help, help! I'm buried. Is anyone there? Help, I can't breathe." The voice in the distance was Praitnath's, and Clark decided he would stop to help. The others turned around and went up toward the top of the building, thinking they could escape to the roof.

Clark said later there was something in Praitnath's scream that impelled him to stay. His feet felt glued to the 81st floor. While the others in his group complained about the smoke and fumes, Clark said he felt like there was a bubble of protective oxygen around his head; the smoke never affected him. Those who went upward all



perished. They didn't know the exit doors to the roof were locked after the 1993 terrorist bombing of the World Trade Center garage.

Through the rubble, Praitnath saw Brian Clark's flashlight in the distance. Clark called out in the direction of the screams, but Praitnath couldn't hear because he was temporarily deaf.

Crawling toward the light

"I started crawling as fast as possible toward the light, because I knew if that man left me I would die," Praitnath recalls. Praitnath could hear the air pressure sucking papers and other objects out of the shattered windows, probably due to a vortex created by the inferno. It was pitch dark other than the darting flashlight he could see intermittently through the debris.

After he crawled through the wreckage of three departments he finally reached a 10-foot sheetrock wall that was still intact. There was no way to get through it. His entire body was swollen, black and blue by now.

Clark shouted at Praitnath through the wall: "Jump over it and I'll catch you on the other side."

"I can't do it," Praitnath shouted back.

"Think about your family," Clark retorted.

Praitnath tried to jump, but he missed and part of the ceiling caved in. As he reached up to prevent the ceiling from hitting him a two-inch metal screw went through the palm of his hand. He cried out in pain, his body pierced in the same place as his Savior.

"What happened?" Clark called out.



“A metal screw went through my palm,” he winced.

“Bite it out and try again,” Clark said. Praitmnath couldn’t do that, so he hit the piece of wood attached to the screw and it came out of his hand. Immediately his hand ballooned outward like a puffer fish.

“I began to plead with the invisible God,” Praitmnath recalls. “Lord if you wanted me to die why did you bring me all the way here...Who is going to walk my daughters down the aisle when they get married? What will befall my wife? Who will take care of my children? I want to see my family. Lord just give me the strength one time more.” Praitmnath prayed aloud, and Clark could hear him through the wall.

A struggle to breathe

Because of the fumes and smoke, Praitmnath could barely breathe. He was at the end of his rope. He started to look at the wall and caress it gingerly with his good hand. Then he wound up and punched the wall as hard as he could. Miraculously, his hand passed through two layers of sheetrock to the other side, and missed the supporting studs within the wall. “That is the grace of God,” Praitmnath says. “I couldn’t do that now,” he says.

Clark grabbed his hand momentarily, then Praitmnath pulled it back through. Praitmnath began to punch wildly at the hole until he could get his entire head through it, then his shoulders. Clark grabbed his head in a headlock and began to pull. Finally Clark pulled with such force that Praitmnath shot through the hole, they both landed on top of rubble and began to roll.

“He grabbed me and around and round we rolled together,” Praitmnath says. “We landed on the 80th floor.”

When they both got up, Clark slapped him and said, “You could have died, do you know that. You’re crazy.” Then he extended his hand. “Brian Clark.”



“Stanley Praitnath.”

Clark grabbed Praitnath’s hand gently and inspected his wound. They both had blood on their hands.

Finding a brother

Then Clark looked Praitnath in the eyes and said: “All my life I was an only child. I always wanted a brother. I found one today.” They rubbed the blood on their hands together. Then Clark took his hand and put it around Stanley’s shoulder. “Today you’re my blood brother. Come on buddy, let’s go home.”

As they worked their way down 80 flights they saw some terrible sights. One man lay there with a broken back, bleeding from massive head injuries. “Please tell my wife and baby I love them. We just got married.”

Praitnath with Brian Clark

They saw a security guard watching over another injured man as they waited for help to arrive. Praitnath and Clark offered to carry the injured man down. “Don’t touch him,” the security guard said, believing paramedics would arrive shortly. Help never arrived. The security guard could have escaped, but made the ultimate sacrifice.

When they made it to the lobby, they saw cops, emergency workers and fire fighters belching out orders. They yelled to the two men: “Run, run, run to Liberty..” Liberty Street ran next to the World Trade Center.

“I’m going to Trinity Church,” Praitnath said.

“I’m going with you,” Clark replied.



As they left, people shouted at them: “Don’t look up, don’t look around, just run. Go, go, go.” They jumped over fallen debris and giant shards of glass on their way out. Broken glass fell from the sky like confetti. “Not one piece touched us,” Stanley recalls. As they ran away from the building, firefighters ran in with heavy gear on their backs to help others trapped above.

Praimnath heard loud thuds as jumpers from the upper stories hit the pavement. When he glanced up, he could see Tower 2 rock and sway.

The iron fence at Trinity Church

They kept running until they reached Trinity Church. Both men grabbed hold of the iron fence surrounding the church as if their lives

depended on it. As they looked back, panting from exhaustion, they could see Tower 2 sway and then stop.

“I could feel the vibration in the ground,” Praimnath says. He turned to Brian and said: “It’s going down.”

The iron fence at Trinity Church pre-911

At that instant, the building started to implode, one floor smashing on top of another. A giant tsunami of smoke, ash, dust and debris began to rush toward them. Praimnath and Clark disappeared into the cloud and were separated for the rest of the day.

Praimnath made his way through the thick haze until he found a truck driver who gave him a lift to the Brooklyn Bridge. He finally found his wife’s office, but she wasn’t there. She had already gone home.

When the second plane hit the building, Praimnath’s wife, Jennifer, assumed the worst. She waited at home,



hoping and praying, but she thought he was gone. She started to go into shock.

When Praitmnath called from her office she said: “Who is this?”

“It’s me, Stan,” he said.

There was a pause. “Don’t do this to me,” Jennifer said, convinced it was a cruel hoax. “Why are you doing this to me? My husband is dead.”

“It’s me, Stan. The Lord took care of me...I’m coming home to you, girl.”

Praitmnath’s story reminds his wife of the three Hebrew boys in the fiery furnace from the Book of Daniel.

“Those boys in the fiery furnace were unscathed and unharmed,” Jennifer says. “Stan, you were in a towering inferno. Now all the impurities have been burned out of you and you’re well done.”

As they watched news accounts on television in the days that followed, Praitmnath saw a replay of the second plane hit his tower. “If you look at the video,” Praitmnath says, “the plane is coming straight in toward the building and at the last minute it makes a tilt.” Praitmnath believes God pushed the plane away from him at the last second, in response to his heart cry to the Lord.

For weeks he struggled with survivor’s guilt. “Why did I live and why did so many good people die?” he asked God.

Then he heard a commentator talking about the significance of the numbers 9-1-1. Praitmnath grabbed his Bible, and madly flipped through the scriptures, not even sure what he was looking for until he landed on Psalm 91:1: “He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.”



“My survival is all about God and his grace, because I’m not a hero,” Praitnath says. “The Lord is the hero. If you call on Him with all your heart and soul He will intervene on your behalf and deliver you,” he says.

“I may never know why some people prayed and God didn’t answer them or why I prayed and he answered me at the same time,” he adds. “But I can tell you this, my God lives!”

If you would like to know God personally, go [here](#)

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Mark Ellis is the founder of God Reports, a website devoted to promoting Christian missions by sharing stories and testimonies from missionaries and mission organizations

